

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of screening blood donors or potential blood donors for carriers of diseases or conditions related to HTLV-I and/or HTLV-II infection, comprising:

subjecting each blood sample from the donors or potential donors to a test for the presence of

(a) HTLV-I and/or HTLV-II Tax protein,

(b) DNA which encodes the HTLV-I Tax protein and/or DNA which encodes the HTLV-II Tax protein, or

(c) antibodies specific to the HTLV-I Tax protein and/or antibodies specific to the HTLV-II Tax protein, in the absence of any other screening test specifically provided to test for infection with either HTLV-I or HTLV-II; and

determining that the donor is a carrier of a disease or condition related to HTLV-I and/or HTLV-II infection when said subjecting step is positive, without input from any other test result.

2. A method in accordance with claim 1, wherein said subjecting step comprises subjecting each blood sample from the donors or potential donors to a test for the presence of DNA which encodes the HTLV-I Tax protein and/or DNA which encodes the HTLV-II Tax protein, in the absence of any other screening test specifically provided to test for infection with either HTLV-I or HTLV-II.

3. A method in accordance with claim 1, wherein said subjecting step comprises subjecting each blood sample from the donors or potential donors to a test for the presence of

antibodies specific to the HTLV-I Tax protein and/or antibodies specific to the HTLV-II Tax protein, in the absence of any other screening test specifically provided to test for infection with either HTLV-I or HTLV-II.

4. A method for screening pregnant women and nursing mothers to determine whether or not breast feeding should be discontinued, comprising:

(a) subjecting a biological fluid sample from a pregnant woman or a nursing mother to a test for the presence of the Tax protein, DNA which encodes the Tax protein, or antibodies specific to the Tax protein; and

(b) determining that breast feeding should be discontinued if said subjecting step is positive for the presence of the Tax protein, or antibodies specific to the Tax protein.

5. A method in accordance with claim 4, wherein said biological fluid is blood.

6. A method in accordance with claim 4, further including, prior to said subjecting step (a), the step of (c) subjecting a biological fluid from the pregnant woman or nursing mother to a test for HTLV-I and/or HTLV-II structural proteins, and, only if said subjecting step (c) is negative, conducting said subjecting step (a), and wherein said determination that breast feeding should be discouraged occurs when either the said subjecting step (c) or subjecting step (a) is positive.

7. A method in accordance with claim 4, wherein said subjecting step comprises subjecting a biological fluid sample

from a pregnant woman or a nursing mother to a test for the presence of DNA which encodes the HTLV-I Tax protein and/or DNA which encodes the HTLV-II Tax protein.

8. A method in accordance with claim 7, further including, prior to said subjecting step (a), the step of (c) subjecting a biological fluid from the pregnant woman or nursing mother to a test for HTLV-I and/or HTLV-II structural proteins, and, only if said subjecting step (c) is negative, conducting said subjecting step (a), and wherein said determination that breast feeding should be discouraged occurs when either the said subjecting step (c) or subjecting step (a) is positive.

9. A method in accordance with claim 4, wherein said subjecting step comprises subjecting a biological fluid sample from a pregnant woman or a nursing mother to a test for the presence of antibodies specific to the HTLV-I Tax protein and/or antibodies specific to the HTLV-II Tax protein.

10. A method in accordance with claim 9, further including, prior to said subjecting step (a), the step of (c) subjecting a biological fluid from the pregnant woman or nursing mother to a test for HTLV-I or HTLV-II structural proteins, and, only if said subjecting step (c) is negative, conducting said subjecting step (a), and wherein said determination that breast feeding should be discouraged occurs when either the said subjecting step (c) or subjecting step (a) is positive.